

[P. 165-C]

Among Putnam's net hunters, a more frequent use of skin, of late, has been in the form of a sling for carrying babies, but this is still rare. 237
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Clay and stone are likewise ignored as possible raw materials, nor are there any reports that the Mbuti worked metal at any time. Apart from an exceptional case among the net hunters, quoted by Schebesta (1933), such metal as they require for knife and ax blades, and for arrow and spearheads, they obtain already worked from the villagers. 325
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If the villager supplies the handle as well as the triangular blade, Putnam (1948, 326) writes that the invariable method of hafting is to burn a hole through the wood to take the narrow end of the blade. If the blade alone is supplied, the Pygmy takes a thin sapling or a light branch, splits it, and, without removing the bark, lashes the blade in place with twine or rattan. If a Pygmy is using an ax up in a tree, he will always choose one of his own hafting, because it is lighter. Both men and women use these axes. Putnam (1948, 326) writes that they never use adzes, which are the chief tools of the village woodworkers. 412
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[114] the most general nature of the forest context and in absolute ignorance of the structure of the forest world. But this in turn leads to another reason for considering the village world first, for the universality of the misconception and its common cause are in themselves highly significant. The misconception, that is to say the notion of the Mbuti as a subordinate and dependent people is, although a myth in actuality, nonetheless a structural factor of the greatest importance, and it is the relationship of the Mbuti to the village world that leads to some of the most interesting elements in the over-all social framework of Mbuti society as it is today. It is not our intent to say what elements of Mbuti society are caused by their relationship with the villagers, but it is certain that many elements, such as the constant process of fragmentation, fission and fusion, take on special significance in light of that relationship. Even the most central religious [178] institutions, sacred to the forest, appear to be in the process of adaptation, allowing for and encouraging a widening of the Mbuti social horizon, bringing about a wider sense of unity (both religious and political) than apparently existed before.

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262 Ostensibly the relationship is based upon the economic dependence of the Mbuti on the villagers for food and metal. Both manioc and bananas (sweet as well as plantain) are grown throughout the Ituri region and jointly form the staple. Both foods are eagerly sought and consumed by all Mbuti, who in the forest have nothing akin to the banana or to the large manioc root. The small, sweet forest *itaba* root [222] has to be grubbed for, and, as the Mbuti say, it is much easier to get manioc from the villagers. Other village foods consumed by the Mbuti are groundnuts, corn, rice and beans but, as for the villagers, they are supplementary. Any of these foods may be carried off to the forest camps and consumed there. Indeed in any village on almost any day [482]
[462] one is likely to see a pygmy woman or two filling her carrying basket to capacity with such foods and returning to the forest camp. If the hunting camp is nearby, a regular supply line is maintained, and even forest food becomes supplementary in Mbuti diet.

439 When in the village the Mbuti also have access to luxuries such as palm wine, and to certain trade goods; tobacco and second-hand clothes are the most important such items.

• [325] Having no knowledge of metalworking,¹ the Mbuti are without a

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[177] ¹ A few Mbuti prisoners were taught by the Belgian administrator at Mambasa how to hammer arrow tips as part of his campaign to "liberate" the Mbuti from their dependence upon the villagers.

THE MBUTI/VILLAGER RELATIONSHIP

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doubt wholly dependent upon the villagers for all metal goods. So also with pottery, there being absolutely no knowledge of pottery manufacture among the Mbuti.

But it is significant that none of the authorities who cite the lack of these foodstuffs and metallurgical and ceramic skills among the Mbuti as an example of their economic dependence also cite the absence, among the Mbuti, of all knowledge of fire-making.² By the same reasoning this should make them dependent on the villagers for matches. The point is that mere lack does not constitute a necessary structural dependence, unless the lack is vital. We have to ask ourselves how necessary is this apparent economic dependence of the Mbuti upon the villagers.

It will be shown in the section on "The Forest World" that there is no question of any absolute dependence of the Mbuti upon the villagers for food, in that context, except insofar as luxuries ultimately tend to become necessities. It will be seen that in the forest their technology is sufficient to keep them supplied with all their basic needs. It will also be seen that metal is not a necessary part of their technology, any more than is pottery, or knowledge of fire-making.

In the village world, however, the Mbuti are completely dependent upon the villagers. Hunting and gathering in the neighborhood of any village are likely to be equally poor, and it would be difficult if not impossible for an Mbuti band to keep itself supplied with forest foodstuffs from a village headquarters. It would involve a half day's march, at least, to reach a suitable hunting area, and the physical effort alone would be enough to discourage even the most ardent hunter. But even more important is the fact that by living in the village the Mbuti would be out of touch with the forest, and would have no way of knowing the exact whereabouts of the game at any given time. Living in a hunting camp with the forest all around them, the Mbuti know only what is going on in their immediate vicinity. As the game moves

² Some Mbuti have learned to use matches, when available, and a few know of the fire drill from contact with their village neighbors. There is absolutely no indigenous method of making fire, however, and it is a point of no small importance to their social life that each household maintains its own hearth. Embers from this hearth are carried, usually by the woman, wrapped in fire-resistant leaves, during the hunt or while on the trail. At each new camp site, the family hearths are kindled from embers of the old family hearths, preserving a distinct sense of continuity. Whenever a communal hearth is required, as for the *molimo*, communal participation is accentuated by the compulsory contribution of embers from each family hearth. Whereas matches are rarely used, becoming quickly damp and useless, even if available, they are never used for kindling family or communal hearths, but only for such relatively mundane purposes as lighting a pipe or cigarette.

224 out of that vicinity, however, they keep track of it, and they send out
433 scouts to help them decide the best location for their next hunting
camp.

439 Insofar as the Mbuti are dependent upon the villagers for village
262 foods, thus far are they dependent also for certain items of material
252 culture, in metal, pottery and wood. Even so, of the village foods
415 only rice and beans (neither of which can be considered as staples even
* 179 among the villagers) demand pottery or metal cooking vessels. Trade
vessels of aluminum are rapidly replacing all pottery vessels. Manioc,
plantains, corn and peanuts can be roasted, the sweet banana and
peanut can be eaten raw, and manioc can also be eaten without cook-
ing if it is first soaked in cold water for several days.

439 However, in every Mbuti village camp each household will boast at
415 least one metal vessel, and there will be one or two wooden mortars
* 179 and pestles for common usage. In addition, there is only the metal
439 knife blade which might be said to be necessary to the Mbuti in their
412 village life, for peeling, scraping and cutting the manioc root, and the
* 179 metal ax blade needed for cutting the saplings used in the construc-
tion of either village-type houses or forest-style huts. The technologi-
cal dependence of the Mbuti upon the villagers, in the village, is then
not great, and is directly contingent upon Mbuti dependence upon
village foods in the same context.

• 325 We shall see that in the forest context, as with food, there is no es-
sential dependence either on materials such as metal, or on skill in
224 working them. It has been argued that the Mbuti hunt is dependent
411 upon metal arrow-points, spear blades, and knife blades. It is not. We
shall see that the Mbuti frequently prefer to use the poisoned arrows
that have only a fire-hardened tip, for sound practical reasons; that
they use the spear primarily for defense rather than offense, and in
any case still retain knowledge of the fire-hardened point and the be-
lief that it is as effective as metal except, possibly, against buffalo and
elephant. Old Mbuti assert that fire-hardened spears are effective even
412 against the largest game. Slit bamboo and slit reeds offer adequate
cutting surfaces, though they dull quickly and are seldom used to-
day; they could, however, successfully replace the metal knife as far
as the forest life of the Mbuti is concerned. There are certain types of
[322] vine that have a highly abrasive surface and can be used for scraping
[324] itaba roots. Of all the village utensils, the two that the Mbuti would
miss the most would be the machete and the ax blade. The machete
is used for cutting the light *fito* saplings that form the framework for